

# MARRIAGE AND THE MORAL LAW

*Address of Pope Pius XII*  
'VEGLIARE CON SOLLECITUDINE'  
1951

LONDON: CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY





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# ADDRESS (VEGLIARE CON SOLLECITUDINE)

of  
His Holiness

# PIUS XII

By Divine Providence

# POPE

To Members of the Congress of the  
Italian Association of Catholic Midwives  
on the 29th October, 1951

ON

# MARRIAGE AND THE MORAL LAW

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY  
38 to 40 Eccleston Square, London, S.W.1



The Italian text of this Address, including the chapter headings, was published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* vol. xxxxi, 1951, num. 17-18.

This translation was first published by the Pontifical Court Club.

The sub-headings are not contained in the original.

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## MARRIAGE AND THE MORAL LAW

### THE MIDWIFE'S CHRISTIAN DUTY

**B**ELOVED DAUGHTERS, the object of your profession, the secret of its grandeur and its beauty lies in this, that you guard with care the silent, humble cradle wherein Almighty God has infused an immortal soul into the seed provided by the parents, and this you do in order to give your professional assistance to the mother and to prepare a successful birth for the child she carries in her womb.

When you reflect on the wonderful collaboration of the parents, of nature and of God, as a result of which a new human being is born to the image and likeness of the Creator (Gen. 1:26, 27), you cannot help valuing at its proper worth the precious co-operation you contribute to an event of such importance. The heroic mother of the Machabees said to her sons: 'I know not how you were formed in my womb; for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world formed the nativity of man' (2 Mach. 7:22).

Hence whoever approaches this cradle of the formation of life and plays a part there, in one way or another, should know the order the Creator lays down to be followed and the laws that rule this order. For here it is not a question of physical or of biological laws which are automatically obeyed by agents not endowed with reason, or of blind forces, but it is a question of laws, the execution and the effects of which are confided to the voluntary and free co-operation of man.



This order founded by a supreme intellect is directed to the end designed by the Creator. It embraces not only the external acts of man, but also the internal consent of his free will — it covers acts as well as omissions when duty so demands. Nature places at man's disposal the whole chain of the causes which give rise to a new human life; it is man's part to release the living force, and to nature pertains the development of that force, leading to its completion. Once man has fulfilled his part and set in motion the marvellous evolution of life, it is his duty to respect religiously its progress and the same duty forbids him either to halt the course of nature or to prevent its natural development.

Thus the part played by nature and the part played by man are precisely determined. Your professional training and experience enable you to know the part played by nature and by man, together with the rules and laws to which both are subject. Your conscience, enlightened by reason and by faith under the guidance of divine authority, teaches you on the one hand what you may lawfully do and on the other hand what you are in duty bound to refrain from doing.

In the light of these principles, We now propose to lay before you some considerations on the apostolate to which your profession binds you. Every profession willed by God carries with it a mission — the mission to carry out, within the bounds of the profession itself the plan and intention of the Creator and to help man to understand the justice and the holiness of the divine scheme and the benefit that will be given to those who carry it out.

## I

## **YOUR PROFESSIONAL APOSTOLATE IS CARRIED OUT FIRST AND FOREMOST THROUGH YOUR PERSONAL INFLUENCE**

Why is your service called for? Because people are convinced that you know your business, because you know what is good for the mother and child, because you are aware of the dangers to which both are exposed and how these same dangers may be avoided and overcome. Your advice and help are expected, limited though they may be and not infallible, but in keeping with the latest developments both in theory and in fact of the profession in which you specialise.

And if all this is expected of you, it is because people have confidence in you, and this confidence is, above all, something personal. Your character must inspire it. That this confidence in you be not misplaced is not only your keen desire, but also something demanded by your office and profession and consequently your bounden duty. Hence you strive to reach the summit of the knowledge of your craft.

### **PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE**

But your professional skill is demanded, too, by the nature of your apostolate. What weight, in point of fact, would your views on the moral and religious issues connected with your office carry, if you were seen to be lacking in professional knowledge? On the other hand your intervention in the moral and religious field will be the more effective if, by your superior technical ability you command respect. To the favourable opinion that you will deservedly win for yourselves there will be added also



in the minds of those who seek your help, the well founded belief that your Christian convictions faithfully put into practice, far from being an obstacle to your professional worth, will be its support and guarantee. It will be plain to all that in the exercise of your profession you are aware of your responsibility before God — and that it is your faith in God which is the strongest argument encouraging you to give your assistance with greater devotion in proportion to the gravity of the need. In this solid religious foundation you find the strength to counter any unreasonable and immoral claim from whatever quarter with a calm, undaunted and unswerving denial.

#### CHRISTIAN SINCERITY

Esteemed and appreciated as you are for your personal conduct no less than for your knowledge and experience, you will find the care of mother and child will be readily confided to you, and, perhaps even without you yourselves realising it, you will exercise a profound, often silent, but efficacious apostolate of a living Christianity. Great, in fact, as may be the moral authority due to qualities strictly professional, your personal influence will find its fulfilment chiefly in the twofold guarantee of genuine human feeling and real Christian living.

## II

### THE SECOND ASPECT OF YOUR APOSTOLATE IS YOUR ZEAL TO UPHOLD THE VALUE AND INVIOABILITY OF HUMAN LIFE

The world to-day has urgent need of conviction in this regard by the threefold testimony of mind, heart and facts. Your profession offers you the possibility of giving such

testimony and even lays upon you the duty of doing so. Sometimes this testimony will take the form of a simple word spoken tactfully at the right moment to the mother or the father; more frequently it will be expressed in your demeanour and the conscientious way in which you act will have an unobtrusive but effective influence on them both.

#### THE LIFE OF THE INFANT, EVEN UNBORN, BELONGS TO GOD

You more than anyone else are in a position to know and appreciate what human life is in itself and to determine its worth in the light of sound reasoning, of your own moral conscience, of civil society, of the Church, and, above all, in the eyes of God. The Lord has made all the other things on earth for man, and man himself, both in his existence and in his essence, has been fashioned for God and not for other creatures, even though, in so far as his behaviour is concerned, he has a duty to the community. Now even the unborn child is 'man' to the same degree and by the same title as the mother.

#### 'THOU SHALT NOT KILL'

Furthermore every human being, even a child in the mother's womb, has a right to life *directly* from God and not from the parents or from any human society or authority. Hence there is no man, no human authority, no science, no medical, eugenic, social, economic or moral 'indication' that can offer or produce a valid juridical title to a *direct* deliberate disposal of an innocent human life; that is to say, a disposal that aims at its destruction whether as an end or as a means to another end which is, perhaps, in no way unlawful in itself. Thus for example, to save the life of the mother is a very noble end; but the direct killing of the child as a means to that end is not



lawful. The direct destruction of the so-called 'life without value' whether born or yet to be born, such as was practised very widely a few years ago, cannot in any way be justified. Hence when this practice began, the Church formally declared that it was against the natural law and the divine positive law, and consequently unlawful to kill, even by order of the public authorities, those who were innocent but, on account of some physical or mental defect, rendered useless to the State and a burden upon it. (Decree Holy Office, 2nd December 1940—*Acta Apost. Sedis*, Vol. 32, 1940, pages 553-554).

#### 'THOU SHALT NOT KILL'

The life of one who is innocent is untouchable, and any direct attempt or aggression against it is a violation of one of the fundamental laws without which secure human society is impossible. We have no need to teach you in detail the meaning and the gravity in your profession of this fundamental law. But never forget that there rises above every man-made code and above every 'indication' the faultless law of God.

The apostolate of your profession demands of you that you pass on to others that knowledge of human life, that regard and respect for it, which your Christian faith nurtures in your hearts. You must, when called upon, be prepared to defend resolutely and to protect, when possible, the helpless and hidden life of the child, following the divine precept '*Non occides*,' Thou shalt not kill (Exod. 20:13).

Such defensive action becomes at times most necessary and urgent, but nevertheless, it is not the most noble and important part of your mission. This, in fact, is not purely negative, but is eminently constructive and it aims at encouraging, edifying and strengthening.

#### THE CHILD IS A GIFT FROM GOD'S LOVE

Instil into the minds and hearts of the mother and father the esteem and joyous desire of the new-born child so that it is welcomed with love from the moment of its birth. The child, formed in the womb of the mother, is a gift from God (Ps. 126:3), Who confides its care to the parents. With what a delicate and charming touch does Holy Writ describe the children seated at table with their father! They form the reward of the just man, whereas sterility is often the punishment of the sinner. Listen to the divine utterance expressed with the matchless poetry of the Psalmist: 'Thy wife as a fruitful vine, on the sides of thy house. Thy children as olive plants, round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord!' (Ps. 127:3-4). But of the wicked man it is written: 'May his posterity be cut off; in one generation may his name be blotted out' (Ps. 108:13).

Hasten to lay the new-born child in the arms of the father as did the Romans of old, but do it for an incomparably higher motive. With the Romans it was a recognition of paternity and of the authority that arises from it; with us, it will be to pay homage to the Creator, to call down God's blessing and to undertake to carry out with devout affection the office which God has entrusted to him. If Our Lord praises and rewards the faithful servant for having made good use of five talents (cf. Matt. 25:21), what praise, what a recompense, will He not set aside for the father who has protected and reared for Him the human life which was confided to him; a treasure of greater value than all the gold and silver in the world.



**HELP THE MOTHER TO ENJOY HER HAPPINESS**

Your apostolate, however, is concerned above all with the mother. Without doubt the voice of nature speaks in her and places in her heart the desire, the courage, the love and the will to take care of the child; but in order to overcome the suggestions of faintheartedness from whatever cause, that voice needs to be strengthened and to strike, so to speak, a supernatural note. It falls to you, by your bearing and manner of acting rather than by words, to make the young mother realise the greatness, the beauty, the nobility of that life which now is awakening, and which is being shaped and quickened in the womb, the life that is born of her, that she carries in her arms and nourishes at her breast. It rests with you to help her to appreciate the greatness of the gift of God's love for her and for her child. The Sacred Scriptures bring to our ears with many examples an echo of the prayers of supplication and, then, of the hymns of grateful joy of many mothers whose prayers at length were heard after having long implored with tears the grace of motherhood.

And those sorrows, too, which, after original sin, the mother has to suffer to bring her child into the world, help to bind more tightly the link which unites them. Her love is in proportion to her suffering. This has been expressed with moving and profound simplicity by Him Who has formed the hearts of mothers: 'A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man has been born into the world' (John 16:21). Besides, the Holy Spirit, by the pen of the Apostle St Paul, shows once again the grandeur and joy of motherhood; 'God gives the child to the mother but in giving it, He makes her co-operate effectively in the unfolding of the flower, the

seed of which He had sown in her, and this co-operation becomes the way that leads her to eternal salvation.' 'Woman will be saved by child-bearing' (1 Tim. 2:15).

This perfect agreement between faith and reason gives you a guarantee that you are in the right and that you can pursue with unconditional security your apostolate of appreciation and love of the life that is being born. Should you succeed in exercising this apostolate at the side of the cradle in which the newly-born utters its first cries, it will not be difficult for you to achieve what your conscience as midwives, in keeping with the law of God and of nature, expects you to prescribe for the good of the mother and the child.

**TO REGARD CHILDREN AS A 'BURDEN' IS UNNATURAL AND WICKED**

It is not, moreover, necessary for Us to prove to you who have experienced it, how essential nowadays is that apostolate of appreciation and love for the new life. Unfortunately, cases are not rare in which even a cautious reference to children as a 'blessing' is enough to provoke a downright denial and perhaps even derision. Far more frequently, in thought and in words, the attitude of considering children a heavy 'burden' predominates. How opposed is this frame of mind to the mind of God and to the words of Holy Scripture, and, for that matter, to sound reason and the sentiment of nature! Should there be conditions and circumstances in which parents, without violating the law of God, can avoid the 'blessing' of children, such cases of *force majeure*, however, by no means authorise the perversion of ideas, the disparaging of values, the belittling of the mother who has had the courage and the honour to give life.



**BE READY TO BAPTISE, IF NECESSARY**

If what We have said up to now deals with the protection and the care of the natural life, it should hold all the more in regard to the supernatural life which the newly-born infant receives with Baptism. In the present economy there is no other way of communicating this life to the child who has not yet the use of reason. But, nevertheless, the state of grace at the moment of death is absolutely necessary for salvation. Without it, it is not possible to attain supernatural happiness, the beatific vision of God. An act of love can suffice for an adult to obtain sanctifying grace and supply for the absence of Baptism; for the unborn child or for the newly-born, this way is not open. If, then, we hold that charity towards our neighbour imposes upon us the obligation of helping him in case of necessity, this obligation is increased in proportion to the importance of the good to be procured or the evil to be avoided. Again, it is increased when the person in need is unable to help or save himself.

It is, therefore, easy to understand the importance of giving Baptism to the infant completely without the use of reason, when it is in serious danger or facing certain death. Undoubtedly this obligation is binding in the first place on the parents; but in urgent cases, where there is no time to lose, or it is impossible to obtain a priest, yours is the sublime duty of administering Baptism. Do not, then, fail in performing this charitable service and in exercising this active apostolate of your profession. Let the words of Jesus be your comfort and your encouragement: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Matt. 5:7). And what act of mercy is greater or more beautiful than to ensure for the soul of the infant between the threshold of life it has just crossed and that of approaching death, the entrance into a glorious and happy eternity!

**III**

**THE THIRD ASPECT OF YOUR APOSTOLATE MAY  
BE DESCRIBED AS HELPING THE MOTHER IN  
THE PROMPT AND GENEROUS FULFILMENT OF  
HER MARITAL DUTIES**

**MOTHERHOOD IS A SHARE IN GOD'S GOODNESS  
AND POWER**

Scarcely had Mary most Holy understood the Angel's message than she replied: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Be it done unto me according to thy word' (Luke 1:38). An eager acceptance of the vocation of motherhood! Virginal motherhood incomparably superior to any other; yet a real motherhood in the true and proper meaning of the word (cfr. Gal. 4:4). For this reason, when reciting the Angelus and after recalling Mary's acceptance, the faithful finish at once with: 'And the Word was made flesh' (John 1:14). It is one of the fundamental requirements of the right moral order that, with the use of the conjugal rights, there should correspond a sincere acceptance of the duties of motherhood.

On this condition, the woman follows the path traced by the Creator to the end He has appointed for the creature, making her, by the exercise of that function, a sharer in His goodness, His wisdom, and His omnipotence in accordance with the Angel's announcement; '*Concipies in utero et paries*'—'Thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son' (Luke 1:31).

If such then is the biological foundation of your professional activity, the urgent object of your apostolate will be to strive to sustain, to reawaken and stimulate the mother's instinct and the mother's love.

When spouses value and appreciate the honour of



producing a new life, and await its coming with a holy impatience, your part is a very easy one; it will be sufficient to cultivate this interior sentiment in them; the readiness to welcome and cherish that growing life follows automatically. Unfortunately, however, it is not always the case; the child is often not wanted; worse still, its coming is often dreaded. In such conditions, how can there be a ready response to the call of duty? Your apostolate in this case must be both powerful and effective; primarily, in a negative way, by refusing any immoral co-operation; then also in a positive way, by deftly applying yourselves to the removal of preconceived ideas, various fears or faint-hearted excuses; and as far as possible to remove also the external obstacles which may cause distress where the acceptance of motherhood is concerned. You may come forward unhesitatingly where you are asked to advise and help in the bringing forth of new life, to protect it and set it on its way towards its full development.

#### REQUESTS THAT ARE UNLAWFUL

But, unfortunately, in how many cases are you rather called upon to prevent the procreation and preservation of this life, regardless of the precepts of the moral order? To accede to such requests would be to abuse your knowledge and your skill by becoming accessories to an immoral act; it would be the perversion of your apostolate. It demands a calm but unequivocal refusal to countenance the transgression of God's law or the dictates of your conscience. It follows, therefore, that your profession requires that you should have a clear knowledge of this divine law, so that it may be respected and followed without excess or defect.

#### GOD'S UNCHANGING LAW

Our Predecessor, Pius XI, of happy memory, in his Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, December 31st, 1930, solemnly proclaimed anew the fundamental law governing the marital act and conjugal relations; he said that any attempt on the part of the husband and wife to deprive this act of its inherent force or to impede the procreation of a new life, either in the performance of the act itself, or in the course of the development of its natural consequences, is immoral, and furthermore, no alleged 'indication' or need can convert an intrinsically immoral act into a moral and lawful one (cf. *Acta Ap. Sedis*, vol. 22, p. 559 et seq.).

This precept is as valid to-day as it was yesterday, and it will be the same to-morrow and always, because it does not imply a precept of human law but is the expression of a law which is natural and divine. Let these words be your unfailing guide in all cases where your profession and your apostolate demand of you a clear and unequivocal decision.

#### DIRECT STERILIZATION IS IMMORAL

It would be more than a mere want of readiness in the service of life if the attempt made by man were to concern not only an individual act but should affect the entire organism itself, with the intention of depriving it, by means of sterilization, of the faculty of procreating a new life. Here, too, you have a clearly established ruling in the Church's teaching which governs your behaviour both internally and externally. Direct sterilization—that is, the sterilization which aims, either as a means or as an end in itself, to render child-bearing impossible—is a grave violation of the moral law, and therefore unlawful. Even public authority has no right, whatever 'indication'



it may use as an excuse, to permit it, and much less to prescribe it or to use it to the detriment of innocent human beings. This principle has already been enunciated in the above mentioned Encyclical of Pius XI on *Marriage* (pp. 564-565).

So, therefore, ten years ago, when sterilization came to be more widely used, the Holy See was obliged to make an explicit and solemn declaration that direct sterilization, whether permanent or temporary, of the man or of the woman, is unlawful, and this by virtue of the natural law from which the Church herself, as you well know, has no power to dispense (Dec. Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, February 22nd, 1940; *Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1940, p. 73).

Do all you can, therefore, in your apostolate, to oppose these perverse tendencies, and refuse your co-operation in them.

#### NATURAL STERILITY

The further serious problem presents itself to-day whether and how far the obligation of readiness to fulfil the duty of motherhood can be reconciled with the ever increasing recourse to the periods of natural sterility (the so-called agenesical periods in the woman), a practice which seems to be the clear expression of a will opposed to that readiness.

You are rightly expected to be well informed, from the medical point of view, of this well-known theory and of the progress which can still be foreseen in this matter; and moreover, your advice and help are expected to be based, not on simple, popular publications, but on scientific facts and the authoritative judgment of conscientious specialists in medicine and biology. It is your office and not that of

the priest, to instruct married people by private consultation or through serious publications on the medical and biological aspect of the theory, without at the same time allowing yourselves to be drawn into discussions which are neither right nor becoming.

But in this field, too, your apostolate demands of you as women and as Christians that you know and defend the moral law to which this theory is subordinated. And here the Church is competent to speak.

In the first place, there are two hypotheses to be considered. If the application of this theory means nothing more than that married people use their matrimonial rights even during the time of natural sterility, there is nothing to be said against it; by so doing, they do not in any way prevent or prejudice the consummation of the natural act and its further natural consequences. It is precisely in this that the application of the theory we are discussing is essentially distinct from the abuse of it already mentioned, which consists of a perversion of the act itself. If, however, a further step is made, that is, of restricting the marital act exclusively to that particular period, then the conduct of the married couple must be examined more attentively. Here, again, two alternatives must be considered.

#### THE MARITAL RIGHT ITSELF

If, even at the time of the marriage, it was the intention of the man or woman to restrict the marital *right* itself to the periods of sterility and not merely the *use* of that right, in such a way that the other partner would not even have the right to demand the act at any other time, that would imply an essential defect in the matrimonial consent. This would invalidate the marriage itself, because the right deriving from the marriage contract is a permanent right,



uninterrupted and continuous, of each of the partners in respect of the other.

#### THE USE OF THE MARITAL RIGHT

If, on the other hand, the limitation of the act to the times of natural sterility refers not to the right itself but only to the use of the right, there is then no question of the validity of the marriage. Nevertheless, the moral lawfulness of such conduct would be affirmed or denied according as to whether or not the intention to keep constantly to these periods is based on sufficient and reliable moral grounds. The sole fact that the couple do not offend against the nature of the act and that they are willing to accept and bring up the child that is born notwithstanding the precautions they have taken, would not of itself alone be a sufficient guarantee of a right intention and of the unquestionable morality of the motives themselves.

#### THE PRIMARY DUTY

The reason is that marriage binds to a state of life which, while conferring certain rights, at the same time imposes the accomplishment of a positive work which belongs to the very state of wedlock. This being so, the general principle can now be stated that the fulfilment of a positive duty may be withheld should grave reasons, independent of the good will of those obliged to it, show that such fulfilment is untimely, or make it evident that it cannot equitably be demanded by that which requires the fulfilment—in this case, the human race.

The marriage contract which gives the spouses the right to satisfy the inclinations of nature established them in a state of life, the married state. Nature and Creator impose upon the married couple who use that state by carrying out its specific act, the duty of providing for the conserva-

tion of the human race. Herein we have the characteristic service which gives their state its peculiar value—the good of the offspring. Both the individual and society, the people and the State, and the Church herself, depend for their existence on the order which God has established on fruitful marriage. Hence, to embrace the married state, to make frequent use of the faculty proper to it and lawful only in that state, while on the other hand, always and deliberately to seek to evade its primary duty without serious reasons, would be to sin against the very meaning of married life.

#### REASONS THAT MAY EXEMPT

Serious reasons, often put forward on medical, eugenic, economic and social grounds, can exempt from that obligatory service even for a considerable period of time, even for the entire duration of the marriage. It follows from this that the use of the infertile periods can be lawful from the moral point of view and, in the circumstances which have been mentioned, it is indeed lawful. If, however, in the light of a reasonable and fair judgment, there are no such serious personal reasons, or reasons deriving from external circumstances, then the habitual intention to avoid the fruitfulness of the union, while at the same time continuing fully to satisfy sensual intent, can only arise from a false appreciation of life and from motives that run counter to true standards of moral conduct.

Here you will perhaps urge a point, and say that sometimes, whilst engaged in your profession, you find yourselves face to face with very delicate cases, namely, those in which to run the risk of motherhood cannot be demanded, nay, where motherhood must be absolutely avoided, and where on the other hand the use of sterile periods either does not afford a sufficient safeguard, or where, for other



reasons, it must be discarded. And so, you ask, how it is still possible to speak of an apostolate in the service of motherhood?

#### GOD'S LAW MAY REQUIRE COMPLETE ABSTENTION

If, in your sure and experienced judgment, the circumstances definitely demand a 'No', that is to say, that motherhood is unthinkable, it would be a mistake and wrong to prescribe a 'Yes'. Here it is a question of concrete facts, and therefore a medical, not a theological question, and so it is within your competence. However, in such cases, the married couple do not ask you for a medical answer, an answer which must necessarily be negative; they seek rather your approval of a 'technique' of marital relationship that is proof against the risk of motherhood. So, here again, you are called upon to exercise your apostolate, in as much as you leave no doubt that, even in extreme cases, every preventive practice and every direct attack on the life and development of the seed is forbidden and banned in conscience, and that there is only one thing to do, and that is, to abstain from any complete use of the natural faculty. In this matter your apostolate demands clear and certain judgment and a calm firmness.

It will be objected, however, that such abstinence is impossible, that heroism such as this is not feasible. At the present time you can hear and read of this objection everywhere, even from those who, because of their duty and authority, should be of quite a different mind. The following argument is brought forward as proof: No one is obliged to do the impossible and no reasonable legislator is presumed to wish by his law to bind persons to do the impossible. But for married people to abstain for a long time is impossible. Therefore they are not bound to abstain: divine law cannot mean that.

#### GOD'S HELP IS A REALITY TO THOSE WHO WANT IT

In such manner of argument a false conclusion is reached from premises which are only partially true. To be convinced of this, one has simply to reverse the terms of the argument: God does not oblige us to do the impossible. But God obliges married people to abstain if their union cannot be accomplished according to the rules of nature. Therefore, in such cases, abstinence is possible. In confirmation of this argument, we have the doctrine of the Council of Trent which, in the chapter on the necessary and possible observance of the Commandments, referring to a passage in the works of Augustine, teaches: 'God does not command what is impossible, but when He commands, He commands, He warns you to do what you can and to ask His aid for what is beyond your powers, and He gives His help to make that possible for you' (Conc. Trid., sess. 6, ch. XI, Denzinger n. 804—S. August. *De natura et gratia*, ch. 43, no. 50 Migne P.L. vol. 44, coll. 271).

Do not be disturbed when, in the practice of your profession and in your apostolate, you hear this clamour about impossibility. Do not let it cloud your internal judgment, nor affect your exterior conduct. Never lend yourselves to anything whatsoever which is opposed to the law of God and your Christian conscience. To judge men and women of to-day incapable of continuous heroism is to do them wrong. In these days, for many reasons—perhaps through dire necessity, or even at times under pressure of injustice—heroism is being practised to a degree and extent that in times past would have been thought impossible. Why then, if circumstances demand it, should this heroism stop at the limits prescribed by passion and the inclinations of nature? It is obvious that he who does not want to master himself, will not be able to do so; and he who thinks he can master himself,



relying solely on his own powers and not sincerely and perseveringly seeking divine aid, will be miserably deceived. Here, then, you see how your apostolate can win married people over to a service of motherhood, that is, not one of utter servitude to the promptings of nature, but to the exercise of marital rights and duties, governed by the principles of reason and faith.

#### IV

### **FINALLY, THERE IS AN ASPECT OF YOUR APOSTOLATE THAT CONCERNS THE DEFENCE OF THE RIGHT ORDER OF VALUES AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

#### **A WRONG PRINCIPLE**

'Personal values' and the need to respect them, is a subject that for the past twenty years has kept writers busily employed. In many of their elaborate works, the specifically sexual act, too, has a position allotted to it in the service of the person in the married state. The peculiar and deeper meaning of the exercise of the marital right should consist in this: that the bodily union is the expression and actuation of the personal and affective union.

Articles, pamphlets, books and lectures, dealing in particular even with the 'technique of love,' have served to spread these ideas and to illustrate them with warnings to the newly-wed as a guide to marriage that will prevent them neglecting, through foolishness, misplaced modesty, or unfounded scrupulosity, what God, who is Creator also of their natural inclinations, offers to them.

If a new life results from this complete reciprocal gift of the husband and wife, it is a consequence that remains outside or, at the most, at the circumference, so to say, of the 'personal values': a consequence that is not excluded, but is not to be considered as a focal point of marital relations.

According to these theories, the dedication of yourselves to the welfare of the life still hidden in the mother's womb, or to helping the mother to be happily delivered, would be of only minor importance and would take secondary place.

Now, if this relative appreciation merely emphasized the value of the persons of the married couple rather than that of the offspring, such a problem could, strictly speaking, be disregarded. But here there is a question of a serious inversion of the order of values and of purposes which the Creator Himself has established. We are face to face with the propagation of a body of ideas and sentiments directly opposed to serene, deep and serious Christian thought. Here again your apostolate must play its part. You may become the confidantes of the mother and wife and be asked questions about the most secret desires and intimate acts of married life. If so, how could you, aware as you are of your mission, make truth and right order prevail in the judgment and relationship of the married couple, unless you yourselves have precise knowledge and a firmness of character necessary to maintain what you know to be true and righteous?

#### **THE RIGHT PRINCIPLE**

The truth is that marriage, as a natural institution, is not ordered by the will of the Creator towards personal perfection of the husband and wife as its primary end, but to the procreation and education of a new life. The



other ends of marriage, although part of nature's plan, are not of the same importance as the first. Still less are they superior. On the contrary they are essentially subordinate to it. This principle holds good for all marriages, even if they are unfruitful: just as it can be said that all eyes are intended and constructed to see, even though in abnormal cases, because of particular internal or external conditions, they can never be capable of giving sight.

It was precisely for the purpose of putting an end to all uncertainty and wanderings away from the truth, which were threatening to spread mistaken ideas about the order of precedence in the purpose of marriage and the relationship between them, that We ourselves, some years ago (10th March, 1944), drew up a statement placing them in their right order. We called attention to what the very internal structure of their natural disposition discloses, to what is the heritage of Christian tradition, to what the Sovereign Pontiffs have repeatedly taught, and to what was afterwards definitely stated in the Code of Canon Law (Can. 1013, par I). Furthermore, a little while afterwards, to put an end to conflicting opinions, the Holy See, by a public Decree, proclaimed that the appeal of certain modern writers who deny that the procreation and education of the child is the primary end of marriage, or teach that the secondary ends are not essentially subordinate to the primary end, but rather are of equal value and are independent of it, cannot be admitted (S.C.S. Off., 1st April, 1944.—*Act. Apost. Sedis*, vol. 36, 1944, p. 10).

#### THE TRUTH ABOUT 'PERSONAL VALUES'

Does that mean a denial or a diminishing of what is good and right in the personal values which result from marriage and from the marriage act? Certainly not, because in

marriage the Creator has destined human beings, made of flesh and blood and endowed with a mind and a heart, for the procreation of new life, and they are called to be the parents of their progeny as human beings and not irrational animals. It is to this end that God wills the union of married people.

Indeed Holy Writ says of God that He created human kind to His image, created them male and female (Gen. 1: 27), and willed—as we find repeatedly stated in the Holy Bible—that a man 'shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh' (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31). All this is therefore true and willed by God; but it must not be disjoined from the primary function of marriage, that is, from the duty to the new life. Not only the exterior common life, but also all the personal wealth, the qualities of mind and spirit, and finally all that there is more truly spiritual and profound in married love as such, has been placed by the will of nature and the Creator at the service of the offspring. Of its nature, perfect married life means also the complete self-sacrifice of the parents on behalf of their children, and love of husband and wife in its strength and tenderness is an essential need for the most earnest care for the child and the guarantee that this care will be taken. (cf. St Thom. 3p; q.29; a.2 in c; Supp; q.49; a.2 ad I).

#### ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

To consider unworthily the cohabitation of husband and wife, and the marital act as a simple organic function for the transmission of seed, would be the same as to convert the domestic hearth, which is the family sanctuary, into a mere biological laboratory. For this reason, in Our address of September 29th, 1949, made to the International Congress of Catholic Doctors, We formally rejected artificial



insemination in marriage. The marital act, in its natural setting, is a personal action. It is the simultaneous and direct co-operation of husband and wife which, by the very nature of the agents and the propriety of the act, is the expression of the mutual giving which, in the words of Scripture, results in the union 'in one flesh.'

This is much more than the union of two life-germs, which can be brought about even artificially, that is, without the co-operation of the husband and wife. The marital act, in the order of, and by nature's design, consists of a personal co-operation which the husband and wife exchange as a right when they marry.

When, therefore, this interchange of rights is, from the beginning, permanently impossible in its natural form, the object of the marriage contract is essentially vitiated. And what We have already stated, viz., 'Let it not be forgotten: the procreation of a new life according to the will and intention of the Creator alone brings with it, to a most admirable degree of perfection, the realization of the ends intended. It is at the same time in harmony with the bodily and spiritual nature and the dignity of husband and wife and with the normal and wholesome development of the child' (*Acta Apost. Sedis*, vol. 41, 1949, p. 560).

It follows that it is for you to tell the fiancée or the young wife who comes to discuss with you the values of married life, that these personal values relating to the body, sense or spirit, are really good and true, but that the Creator has put them in the second place in the scale of values, and not in the first.

#### VIRGINITY HAS ITS HIGH DIGNITY

There is a further consideration which can easily be forgotten. All these secondary values, in regard to genera-

tion and its processes, are part of the specific duty of husband and wife, namely, to be the parents and educators of the new living being. A high and noble duty! It does not, however, belong to the essence of a complete human being, as though a human being who did not use the generative faculty would suffer some loss of dignity. To renounce the use of that power does not mean any mutilation of personal and spiritual values, especially if a person refrains from the highest motives. Of such a free renunciation made for the sake of the kingdom of God, the Creator has said: '*Non omnes capiunt verbum istud, sed quibus datum est*—All men take not this word but they to whom it is given' (Matt. 19:11).

It is therefore a mistake and a departure from the way of moral truth to exalt too highly the generative function even in its right moral setting of married life. This often happens to-day. Again, it brings the risk of an error of understanding and of misguided affection which hinders and stifles good and noble feelings, especially with young people who have as yet had no experience and are unaware of life's snares. After all, what normal person, healthy in mind and body, would want to belong to the number of those lacking character and spirit?

Do you, however, by your apostolate, wherever you work professionally, enlighten people's minds and instil into them this right order of values, so that men may regulate their judgment and their conduct by it.

#### CONJUGAL JOY IS GOD'S GIFT TO THE MARRIED

Our explanation of the apostolic work of your profession would, however, be incomplete were We not to add a few words more on the defence of human dignity in the use of the generative inclination. The Creator in His goodness and wisdom has willed to make use of the work of the



man and the woman to preserve and propagate the human race, by joining them in wedlock. The same Creator has arranged that the husband and wife find pleasure and happiness of mind and body in the performance of that function. Consequently, the husband and wife do no wrong in seeking out and enjoying this pleasure. They are accepting what the Creator intended for them.

Still, here too, the husband and wife ought to know how to keep within the bounds of moderation. As in eating and drinking, they ought not to give themselves over completely to the promptings of their senses, so neither ought they to subject themselves unrestrainedly to their sensual appetite. This, therefore, is the rule to be followed; the use of the natural, generative instinct and function is lawful in the married state only, and in the service of the purposes for which marriage exists. It follows from this that, only in the married state and in the observance of these laws, are the desires and enjoyment of that pleasure and satisfaction allowed; because pleasure is subject to the law of action from which it springs, and not vice-versa—action made subject to the law of enjoyment of pleasure. And this law, so reasonable, looks not only to the substance but to the circumstances of the action; so that, while the substance of the function is still preserved, sin can be committed by the way it is carried out.

#### HUMAN DIGNITY THRIVES ON MUTUAL RESPECT

The transgression of this law is as old as original sin. However, at the present time, there is a danger of losing sight of this fundamental principle. To-day, in fact, it is customary in speaking and in writing (even among some Catholics) to uphold the necessity of personal freedom, the peculiar purpose and value of sexual relationship and its use, independently of the purpose of the procreation of

offspring. They would like to submit the order established by God to fresh examination and to a new regulation. They would like no other check in the manner of satisfying this instinct than the observance of what is essential to the instinctive act. For the moral obligation to master our passions, they would substitute freedom to make use of the whims and inclinations of nature blindly and without restraint. This must sooner or later result in harm to morality, to conscience, and to human dignity.

If the exclusive aim of nature, or at least, its primary aim, had been the mutual giving and possessing of husband and wife in joy and delight; if nature had arranged that act only to make their personal experience happy in the highest possible degree, and not as an incentive in the service of life, then the Creator would have made use of another plan in the formation and constitution of the natural act. Instead, the act is completely subordinate and ordered to the great and unique law, '*generatio et educatio prolis*' (the generating and educating of children), that is, to the fulfilment of the primary end of marriage as the origin and source of life.

Unfortunately, waves of hedonism never cease to roll over the world. They are threatening to overwhelm the whole of married life in a rising sea of ideas, desires and acts, not without grave danger and to the serious prejudice of the primary duty of husband and wife.

Too often people are not ashamed of exalting this anti-Christian hedonism as though it were a doctrine, by inculcating the desire to make the pleasure in the preparation and the act of conjugal union ever more intense; as if the whole moral law governing marital relations consisted of the proper fulfilment of this act—as if everything else, no matter how carried out, finds its justification in the profuse expression of mutual affection, hallowed by the



sacrament of Matrimony and worthy of praise and reward before God and the conscience of man. All question of man's dignity and of his dignity as a Christian, both of which are a restraint on sensual excess, are set aside.

That is false. The seriousness and holiness of the Christian moral law do not permit the unrestrained satisfying of the sexual instinct, nor such seeking merely for pleasure and enjoyment. It does not allow rational man to let himself be so dominated either by the substance or the circumstances of the act. Some would like to maintain that happiness in married life is in direct ratio to the mutual enjoyment of marital relations. This is not so. On the contrary, happiness in married life is in direct ratio to the respect the husband and wife have for each other, even in the intimate act of marriage. Not that they should regard what nature offers them and God has given them as immoral, and refuse it, but because the respect and mutual esteem which arise from it, are one of the strongest elements of a love which is all the more pure because it is the more tender.

#### DEFEND THE HONOUR OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Whilst performing the duties of your profession, do your utmost to repel the attack of this refined hedonism, which is spiritually an empty thing and therefore unworthy of Christian spouses. Make it clear that nature has undoubtedly given the instinctive desire for pleasure and sanctioned it in lawful wedlock, not as an end in itself, but in the service of life. Banish from your hearts this cult of pleasure, and do your best to stop the spreading of literature which considers it a duty to describe the intimacies of married life under the pretext of giving instruction, guidance and reassurance. In general, common sense, natural instinct, and a short instruction on the clear

and simple maxims of the Christian moral law will suffice to give peace to husband and wife of tender conscience. If, in certain special circumstances, a fiancée or young married woman has need of further enlightenment on some particular point, it is your duty prudently and tactfully to give them an explanation which is in agreement with the natural law and a healthy Christian conscience.

Our teaching has nothing to do with Manicheism or with Jansenism, as some would like to make out in self-justification. It is simply a defence of the honour of Christian marriage and the personal dignity of husband and wife.

To give your services for such a purpose, is a pressing duty of your calling, especially in these days.

So We conclude what We had in mind to explain to you. Your profession offers you a vast and varied apostolate, an apostolate not so much of word as of action and guidance; an apostolate that you will be able to exercise usefully only if you are well-informed, in advance, of the object of your mission and of the means to its fulfilment, and, moreover, if you are gifted with a will strong in resolve that is rooted in a deep religious conviction, inspired and enriched by your faith and by Christian charity.

Whilst We implore for you the powerful help of divine light and strength, now as a pledge and earnest of a generous bounty of heavenly graces, We bestow on you from Our heart, Our Apostolic Blessing.



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